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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000401

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SUBJECT: SOMALI PRESIDENT, AWQAF MINISTER VISIT KUWAIT

REF: KUWAIT 130

Classified By: Ambassador Richard Lebaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: In a March 3-6 visit to Kuwait, Somali President Abdullahi Yusef asked the Amir for humanitarian assistance and support for an upcoming reconciliation conference. The Amir agreed to send humanitarian support, but did not commit to other assistance. Somali Ambassador Abu Bakr believes the visit will help begin to revive a special relationship between Kuwait, and especially the Amir, and Somalia. Somali Awqaf Minister Shaykh Hassan Ismail made a separate visit, but according to Abu Bakr received no financial commitments from the GOK or local Islamic charities. End Summary.

12. (C) Somali President Abdullahi Yusef visited Kuwait March 3-6. In a 3/14 discussion with PolCouns, Somali Ambassador to Kuwait Abdel Qadir Abu Bakr said the President met with the Amir, Crown Prince, Prime Minister, the Arab Fund, and members of Somalia's 4000-5000 strong expat community.

Somali President Requests Humanitarian Aid, Other Support

13. (C) Abu Bakr said President Yusef requested humanitarian assistance, particularly food, medicine and medical equipment for Mogadishu and several of the surrounding provinces. He also asked for direct assistance for an upcoming reconciliation conference in Mogadishu. The Amir was fully supportive of the first request, and directed the Foreign Minister to assemble a survey team to travel to Mogadishu (he was unable to say how soon this would happen). The Amir was more reluctant to agree to support the reconciliation conference, perhaps, Abu Bakr speculated, to avoid getting ahead of other GCC and Arab League members. In a later discussion with PolCouns MFA First Secretary for Arab Affairs Abdel Nasir al-Rasheedi confirmed that Kuwait would not finance or otherwise support a reconciliation conference at this time. He also said the GOK would in the end likely not send a team directly to Mogadishu, but would provide humanitarian assistance through the Kuwaiti Red Crescent.

Reviving Old Ties

14. (C) Abu Bakr described Yusef's meeting with the Amir as "friendly and positive." He said the Amir reminisced about the farm he used to frequently visit (and apparently still owns) outside of Mogadishu on the Shebele river. Abu Bakr said during the 70's and 80's the Amir (then the Foreign Minister) would appear regularly in Somalia to hunt and fish.

15. (C) Abu Bakr was convinced that Somalia is in a position to begin to revive what he sees as a special relationship with Kuwait. He noted that Yusef made no other GCC visits,

although he may travel to Riyadh at the end of the month for the Arab League Summit. A Qatar stop had been in the works, he said, but cancelled over issues related to Doha's "support for the Islamic Courts." Kuwait continues to fund the Somali Embassy in Kuwait, along with a number of Somali diplomatic missions around the world (reftel).

Awqaf Minister Visits As Well

¶6. (C) Following the President's visit, Somali Awqaf Minister Shaykh Hassan Ismail paid a low-key visit to Kuwait last week as well. According to Abu Bakr, the Awqaf Minister contacted him initially calling the visit "official," but the President's office called him soon afterwards telling him it was not official and should be treated as private. Abu Bakr said he left the matter unresolved, but went ahead and accompanied the Minister to meetings with his Kuwaiti counterpart, Justice and Awqaf Minister Abdullah Al-Maatouq, along with several local religious leaders and representatives of Kuwaiti Islamic charities including the Social Reform Society (SRS), the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS), and the International Islamic Charity Organization. Abu Bakr said neither the government nor the charities made any commitments in response the Awqaf Minister's requests for assistance. He noted that the charities in particular had been reluctant in recent years to get involved in Somalia. He said all three had been approached previously by representatives of the Islamic Courts movement but had refused to provide assistance. Abu Bakr, who describes himself as anti-Islamic Courts, said the reason for the refusal was a reluctance on the part of the charities to be linked through the Courts to Al-Qaeda.

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¶7. (C) Bio Note: Ambassador Abu Baker has been accredited to the Kuwaiti government for 19 years, and only infrequently returns to Somalia (he said his last visit was four years ago). In addition to the direct financial support he receives from the GOK for Embassy operations, he is rumored to benefit from business dealings with members of the royal family. He speaks Italian and English fluently, and his office wall prominently displays a photo of himself greeting President Bush soon after the first Gulf War.

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LeBaron